

Underhill Trails Committee
Underhill Town Hall
April 22, 2014

Members present: Carol Butler, Howie McRae, Karen McKnight, Nancy McRae.

Minutes of the September 17, 2013, meeting were approved as written.

Those present reviewed, edited, and approved the draft "Underhill Trails Committee's Summary of Accomplishments".

Nancy moved, Karen seconded, and all were in favor of requesting that the Select Board dissolve the Underhill Trails Committee.

Nancy will compose a letter to the Select Board and attach the summary.

The meeting adjourned at 7:45 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Nancy S. McRae

The Underhill Trails Committee

Summary of Accomplishments

The Underhill Trails Committee was assembled in May, 2008, by the Underhill Select board to assist with an unfavorable situation brewing amongst the residents of Underhill. Various residents of Underhill felt that their rights to privacy were being infringed on by various groups and individuals who were enjoying the private property of these residents without permission.

At the same time, many groups and individuals were complaining that, although the lands being discussed were privately owned, the beautiful lands of Underhill should be open to all to be used for a variety of non-motorized and non-hunting recreational activities.

The Selectboard assembled a committee comprised of property owners and individuals who enjoyed a variety of recreational activities with the intent to provide a place for the discussion of various opinions with the goal of bringing residents together in a peaceful manner.

The Trails Committee was led by the Town Administrator, Chris Murphy, and our first project was to develop a handbook which would provide information for both trail makers and land owners. The handbook included town and state laws and rules for developing trails as well as information about how to build trails while being respectful of the property owners, the environment, trails, and wildlife and the responsibilities of the land owners and trail makers. The Handbook also included information for property owners to be aware of so they could give informed permission for trails to be made.

The committee met with a number of people who have developed trails throughout Vermont as well as with biologists and other individuals from the state level. We then assembled the Trails Handbook to share the information we had accumulated with both property owners and recreationists.

The committee was also assembled to be the mediators for these groups. The committee hosted a number of meetings with residents who had a variety of opinions on how private property should, or should not, be shared. It was also discussed that the town could not insist that property owners open or re-open trails that they did not want on their property.

Once the Handbook was completed it was decided that the committee would put the Handbook model to work by improving the random trail system that had been made on both town owned property and private property near the Crane Brook Trail.

The first step was to contact the adjacent landowners and to inquire as to the desires of each as to whether or not they wished to have the trails on their property and, if so, for what activities. The majority of the property owners expressed their lack of interest in having these trails weaving onto their properties so the Select Board instructed the committee to proceed with the project of improving the trail system with the specific instructions that the trails were to be contained to the town owned property.

In 2011, the Trails Committee revised its mission statement, which is to provide guidance on the development and use of trails within Underhill with an emphasis on respecting property owners, sustaining the environment, and strengthening relationships within the community. Goals were to: 1) educate the public in regard to trail etiquette, the development of trails and the appropriate use of private property; 2) provide a forum where trail users/developers and property owners can voice their opinions and receive assistance with the development or closing of trails on private land; and 3) reroute the Crane Brook Trail off private property, and construct a trail exclusively on town owned land.

The committee addressed the education piece by publishing appropriate articles in the Mountain Gazette.

In May, 2011, members of the committee, Selectman Brad Holden, other interested townspeople, and three representatives from the state ANR walked the Crane Brook trail. It was determined where the wet areas are located, and a route to avoid the Twin Oaks property was devised. Subsequently, the Trails Committee mapped the proposed trail, including a new piece parallel to Irish Settlement Rd. which would allow a complete internal loop, and drew up plans for signage, bridges, parking and informational kiosks. The plan was submitted to the DRB and approved in September with the exception of the kiosks and a parking plan, both of which were referred to the Select Board.

Property owners on the New Rd./Fuller Rd. appealed the DRB decision to the Superior Court Environmental Division and the trail has been tied up in litigation ever since. The committee has been told by the courts that we are not to proceed with this project.

The town does not own any other parcels of land on which the committee could develop a trail and the Selectboard members instructed the committee not to develop trails anywhere in Underhill on private property including along the main roads in town or along the rivers.

The Trails Committee Members feel that we have fulfilled the original goals of the Selectboard.

There have not been any issues between recreational users of the properties and the land owners presented to the Town Administrators, the Selectmen, or the Trails Committee in quite some time. And due to the ongoing litigations for the Crane Brook Trail, the Committee does not feel there is any longer a need for our committee.

It has been recommended that the Trails Committee merge with the Conservation Committee and when the litigation comes to a close, then the Conservation Committee can revise and complete the project on the town owned property. Several members of the trails group are interested in joining the Conservation Committee.

Therefore, the Members of the Underhill Trails Committee voted on April 22nd to request that the Select Board Members dissolve the Underhill Trails Committee.

Carol Butler, Chair

Natalie Coughlin, Vice- Chair

Pat Lamphere

Nancy McRae, Secretary

Howard McRae

Karen McKnight